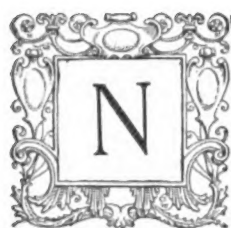


The Mirror of Silence

BY MARY HEATON VORSE



NOW that the house was at last ready for them, Virginia sat quietly in the oval drawing-room which gave on the rose-garden. She was conscious of a depression that grew and grew until from a vague, uneasy pain it became heartsickness. At first she tried to deceive herself into believing that this was because she was tired, but the real truth came and stood before her, refusing to be ignored.

The reason she was heartsick was because in a moment Crystal Ballard, noisy and all-pervasive, would take Thorn House from her. Ever since the Ballards had bought it and she had overseen its repairing and putting in order, Virginia had had the phantasmal feeling that the house was hers. For the first time in her life she knew what home meant; and she had laughed at herself that she should have selected Thorn House with its mellow grandeur to call by the name of home.

At best the Vanes had never been more than comfortably off, and for the past years, after her father and mother died and it turned out there was no more money, she had earned her own living. She had done this by living with the Ballards and helping Crystal order her chaotic, swift-moving life. But though Crystal was Virginia's school friend, no place in which they had lived had seemed home to her—or to them. It was as though their houses, full of rare things chosen by other people, were a sort of department store in which one lived instead of bought. There was so much of everything—so many rooms, so many servants, so many motors. Even flowers became impersonal, they were so perfect and there were so many of them.

Since Crystal had with what to Virginia seemed indecorous offhandedness bought Thorn House, its park and box hedges, and then whisked off to Europe,

leaving Virginia in charge, she had been perfectly happy. She felt as if she had been left on guard to watch a perfect and precious thing from being defaced. It seemed to her as though this house contained in itself some intangible treasure which could be taken from it, and which without her would inevitably have been removed by sacrilegious hands. She had seen to it that none of the golden mellowness of time which years had given it had been stolen from it by careless workmen. Now she walked from one room to another on the pretense of seeing once more that everything was in order. It was like a place enchanted—there was perfect quiet everywhere, and yet it seemed to Virginia that the place was peopled. Mrs. Pollock, the housekeeper, joined her, also bound on a tour of inspection.

"I think everything's in order, Miss Vane," she said. "Do you suppose they'll like it?"

She spoke wistfully, but of the source of her wistfulness Virginia was not sure—whether it was she was anxious to please her new employers or whether she regretted the past.

Virginia asked her, "How do you like it yourself, Mrs. Pollock?"

The old lady clasped her hands together. "It's beautiful, Miss Vane. The months I lived here alone, and the years that they were so feeble and, do the best I could, neglect gaining on the house all the time, it seemed to me as if the light had gone out of it, as much as it could out of a house like this—a house that has a heart of gold. Now it's all lit again. It's a very sad thing, Miss Vane, to watch the light of life burning dimmer and dimmer in those you love. And did you ever notice when people who've lived long in a home are dying, the house dies, too? When Miss Julia wasn't interested any more in the garden it was as if she herself had really died, although she continued to live for a while."

Impulsively Virginia said to her, "It sometimes seems to me that this house belongs to you so much more than to any one else."

"When I thought it was to be taken from me," she answered, "for a minute it seemed to me as if I couldn't live. Then I realized they couldn't quite take it from me, for I had my memories, and I could look at it and go and walk in the park. But when I knew I was to stay, Miss Vane, I knew I had been comforting myself but poorly. And then when I saw you I knew everything would be all right—with the house, I mean—and when I saw what an interest you yourself took in the Annals! Will they keep on with the Annals, do you think, Miss Vane?"

"I think the Annals of the Thorn House stopped with the Thorns," said Virginia.

"Why so?" the old lady asked. "It would be a nice idea, I think, if each house had its Annals as it passed from owner to owner—though, of course, there is more interest when the ladies of one family write it from generation to generation, as they have done for Thorn House."

Virginia smiled, and there was a little irony in her smile; Mrs. Pollock had so little knowledge of this swift-moving age, and of women like Crystal.

They looked out of the window where in its beauty lay the garden.

"It's Thorn House's high season," Mrs. Pollock said. "It looks as if it were ready for a wedding." Virginia shivered a little. She was thinking:

"Good-by, Thorn House! You don't know what's going to happen to you any more than Mrs. Pollock does."

Her ear caught the purr of a motor at high speed. In a second they were coming to take it away from her, and she realized what she had been realizing more definitely from day to day—that it was not only from herself that they were going to take it, but that they would take from it its own personality. They would spill into its restful and hospitable spaces all the extravagance and all the noisy and monotonous variety of their lives.

When the motor stopped at the carriage porch Virginia wondered again if

the proud old place had ever gotten used to the purr of machinery and the indecent noise of automobile horns. Godfrey Ballard got out alone.

"I thought I'd be the advance-guard of the invasion," he told Virginia, and then he walked through the length of one of the rooms with her in silence and turned to her with: "What peace! I didn't know such peace existed in the world."

She looked at him curiously. Peace was not the thing she associated with Godfrey Ballard. "Don't you want to see it all before the others come?" she asked.

It was the last thing she had expected to find herself doing—showing Godfrey the house in this way. As they walked through quiet rooms, his enthusiasm grew until Virginia found herself telling him its legend and its history. She even showed him Thorn House Annals, which ended touchingly with Miss Emily Thorn's fine, trembling hand writing, "Sister was not able to see the white lilies in their glory."

At random Godfrey took up another volume and opened it at a handwriting all dashes and periods. There was humor in the phrases, characterization of guests, touching little entries of births and deaths. This one writing filled almost a whole book, and romance and tragedy and death were in its pages. It was the chronicle of a generation told by a witty, high-hearted, impatient woman.

Godfrey dipped into it here and there, and there came to him an emotion of the past that was like some sweet perfume. He turned a bright look on Virginia. "Is there a portrait of her?" he wanted to know, and, without waiting for an answer: "Do you know what I wish?" he went on. "I wish that Carrington and I had come on a week ahead."

It was a tacit acknowledgment that the house had put its spell on him, and also that he, too, realized that, once peopled as it would be, some essential virtue would be taken from it, and that of all his friends Carrington alone would have understood it.

"Is Carrington coming?" she asked.

"By train, later. A lot of people are coming by train," he supplemented,

idly. "Your lovely old house won't be peaceful long."

"*Your* house, you mean," she corrected him, "and you wouldn't like it to be peaceful."

He shot an odd little glance at her. "People are very glib in deciding what one would like and what one wouldn't. One gets to doing one thing after another so fast as a means of escape. It's like drunkenness. *You* ought to understand things like that."

Virginia felt oddly reproached.

They had been so engrossed that they hadn't heard the motors until they drove up.

"Good-by, peace!" said Godfrey, turning his ironic little smile on her. "I wish they hadn't come yet, don't you, Virginia? *You* wish they wouldn't come at all, don't you?" He smiled at her with mocking friendliness.

Crystal dashed in through the door.

"Hello, Virginia, lamb!" Her voice had a high, piercing quality. "Hello, Godfrey! Oh, but we are smothered in dust. Lead me to the tub, Virginia! But for that providential road-house we would have been choked with thirst by now. Liquids—all kinds—within and without!"

After her streamed Mitzi Kreisler, whose lovely light soprano and engaging personality had made her the idol of New York, and Amy Nicholls and her husband. Mitzi had sat down at a piano and lifted her light, birdlike voice.

"Good heavens!" cried Crystal, "Mitzi can't enter a house without seeing what its acoustic properties are."

"I told you," Mitzi fluted back at her, her sleek, black head on one side, "that I must work here if I came—just a little."

Another motor-load streamed in.

"I'm not going to stay to say 'How do you do?' to every one. Why should I?" Crystal asked Godfrey. "You and Virginia do it. Poor Crystal's got to have a bath. There are queer people who'll want tea first."

Godfrey watched her go up the stairs with some vague dissatisfaction with her stirring in his soul. She had not given the house a passing glance. The nostalgia he had sometimes felt for another existence stirred within him. In the

midst of life he had starved—something essential to happiness had forever escaped him.

It was with an ever-growing annoyance that he had welcomed his guests and later had tea with them upon the terrace. He wanted time to walk through the gardens with Virginia. He felt that he could not stand this sort of a house-party, with all its noise and all its undercurrents. Not one of his guests had looked at the Thorn House; they had entered it as a superior sort of hotel, each one intent upon his own personal intrigues.

Dinner that night was dull and noisy. The voices of the company rose louder and louder. Their laughter grew more and more shrill. Conversation with Crystal was an endless sequence of humorous anecdotes which always got an easy laugh.

Mitzi Kreisler had more wit and more malice; she was as noisy as Crystal. She wore her exquisite manners as any pretty peasant girl might wear a dainty borrowed coat. Among friends she became the peasant. Her easy familiarity was that of a waitress in a country inn. She was saved from vulgarity by the exquisite daintiness of her person and by the perfection of her gestures. Had she been a big woman there would have been a certain grossness about her.

A sense of unreality possessed Virginia. Suddenly all these people seemed to her as if they were people of two dimensions only—mere surfaces moving mysteriously and noisily through life. Through her months of solitude life had crowded in on her. Thorn House had witnessed the spectacle of life; the mysteries of birth and death, of the union of two people in marriage, had filled its days and had peopled it with living memories. In it life had had dignity and, above all things, reality. These people had nothing but an instinct for speed—speed and spending. They went so fast and they made such a noise as they went that they had no chance to meet life. Their lives were stale and flat, and they masked this staleness from themselves by their restlessness. The noise of their chatter increased to babel, as though they were trying to drown the quiet of the spacious room and



ROMANCE AND TRAGEDY AND DEATH WERE IN ITS PAGES

leave the echo of their voices forever resounding through it. Above them the clock struck solemnly and sedately. Its bell was not loud, but there was a perceptible pause after each stroke. It had a curious, warning sound. Then suddenly, like a lamp extinguished, conversation failed. There occurred one of those complete silences which made Crystal's high-pitched voice trail off in the midst of an anecdote. The silence lasted second after second. Mitzi giggled, and Amy Nicholls, seated at Godfrey's side, turned to him as though asking him to speak, as if she could not break through this quiet that had so suddenly encompassed them.

A little movement went around the table like that of cattle stirring uncom-

fortably in their stalls before a storm. Yet no one could break through it. They all seemed to be searching desperately in the depths of their consciousness for something that would loosen the tension, and yet no one seemed to be able to drag from those depths a single word. Servants stood quiet and attentive about the room, watching the company with fascinated eyes. Silence had come down on them suddenly like a storm. It had extinguished their gaiety as a snuffer extinguishes the light of a candle. It endured phantasmally. At last, after what seemed an eternity, Crystal spoke. All she said was:

"What a ghastly clock."

The sound of her voice in this strange quiet was like a sudden shot. Every one

jumped. Mitzi burst out laughing. Then they all laughed, and their laughter was worse than their silence, for it had neither gaiety nor relief, and it held the madness of hysteria. Each one began talking eagerly to his neighbor, and by common consent they ignored the uncomfortable enchantment that had held them.

After dinner Carrington, Godfrey, and Virginia sat together at one end of the music-room, away from the others. There were certain cross-currents and friendships in this company that were taken for granted. Now suddenly their understandings and their mutual forbearances seemed to have been taken away from them. They had always amused one another before; they had had a certain harmony and mutual forbearance. And now suddenly there was none of this. There was in the atmosphere something uncomfortable, as though there were depths within them which some unseen thing had disturbed.

At last Paul Geer burst out, "For Heaven's sake, Mitzi, sing!"

"I don't feel like it," said Mitzi, pertly. "Not millions could make me sing when I don't feel like it."

"Ah, do sing, Mitzi! I have nostalgia to-night," Amy Nicholls urged with gentleness. Mitzi shot a glance at her. There was between them the freemasonry of predatory women whose paths do not touch.

"For *you* I will," she acquiesced. She arose and included all the men in the room in her pert, defiant gaze. It was as though she said, "For a woman I will, but not to-night for my enemy, man!" She went to the piano.

Geer, who usually accompanied her, rose to his feet sullenly. He sat down at the piano with the air of one who says, "If you wouldn't sing for me, I don't wish you to sing for any one."

Mitzi shot a look that held both scorn and dislike. There was something shocking to all the rest about the nakedness of her emotion. The person least sensitive to the moods of others could see that in another second the peasant in her would have the upper hand and she would burst into a torrent of abuse.

She sang. Her voice soared up like the release of a gay, bright-colored bird

from a cage. Then, on the high note she flatted lamentably. It was of a dissonance to make one clap one's hands over one's ears. It had the effect on her as on a skater who has fallen on the ice. She turned angrily to Geer.

"That was your fault," she said, sharply. "Begin again!"

He did not reply, but looked sullenly at the keys. This time her voice soared with its usual facility. Then suddenly one became aware that she was off the key—Mitzi, whose intonation was faultless! Geer turned his head from the music half questioningly, and yet she sang. It was intolerable. No one stirred. They listened as though frozen to this extraordinary thing that had happened.

One could not tell by her manner whether or not she was doing this deliberately, because she wished to affront the ears of those who listened to her. Then, incredibly, her voice broke. There was a second silence, and then Mitzi, her face white with anger, her small fist clenched, cried to Paul Geer:

"You—you!"

The social surface without which society cannot exist was rent. Paul, with the insolence of a certain type of man toward a woman whom he considers deeply his inferior, rose from the piano and lounged away.

Mitzi's anger dissolved into stormy tears. In a moment Crystal had her arm around Mitzi's neck, comforting her.

"Why, Mitzi! What brutes we were to ask you to sing when you were tired!" She was at her sweetest now. "And, besides, the acoustics of this house are perfectly dreadful—of this room, anyway!"

Mitzi, a sob of anger in her voice, declared stormily: "I'll never sing here again! Never—never!" And then, her anger again focusing itself on Paul, "And never, never with you for an accompanist," she cried, flinging out the back of her hand with the gesture of one insolently striking another in the face.

Amy Nicholls dropped down in a chair. Carrington, Virginia, and Godfrey walked forward and began to make conversation with the others. With their coming the tension lessened. Out-

wardly the situation grew more normal. Before the party broke up they managed to regain a precarious foothold on the surface of things.

Next morning Virginia rose early. As she went down the staircase it seemed to her that the house, glad with flowers and flooded with sunshine, welcomed her. She wondered how the nightmare of the evening before could have happened. The wide spaces of the rooms seemed so adapted for conversation, for the most harmonious sort of social life.

She sent for Mrs. Pollock to put in order some of the details of the house. She looked at Virginia with her old eyes full of intelligence, as though there were a thousand things she wished to say to her, but which her sense of decorum would not let her utter. Her face, yesterday so at peace, was drawn and pale.

She went, and presently Carrington lounged in through the rooms. His eyes lighted as they fell on Virginia.

"I didn't expect to find you up!" he cried in joyful surprise, and his greeting was as though he had met an old friend in an alien country. They had seen each other often before, but it had been as though there was some transparent but impenetrable wall between them, which Virginia had sometimes tried to penetrate, and again it had wounded her deeply that Carrington had been so stupid as not to remove this invisible barrier himself. Now, all of a sudden, they had become old friends.

He was an odd one for this galley, with nothing in common with them, for he was both a man of action and a stu-

dent. It was his indestructible and inexplicable friendship with Godfrey that brought him. He smiled at Virginia.

"Can't we have coffee together," he asked, "and on the terrace?" He looked around him. "It makes it hard to believe in last night, doesn't it? You



"I'LL NEVER SING HERE AGAIN! NEVER—NEVER!"

know I've the oddest feeling of there being only ourselves in all the house—as if others just *weren't*! I almost wish I weren't going."

"Going!" Virginia echoed, stupidly. "Oh, why are you going?" She hadn't meant to say it. Her impulsiveness was contrary to anything Carrington had ever seen in her.

"Well," he replied, with equal frankness, "it's not as restful as it might be—the atmosphere, I mean." She looked at him with a forlorn sort of helplessness. "And by myself I feel as if I were some poor little futile barricade which was to stave off Heaven knows what."

He walked to the end of the terrace

and back again. The white peacocks were silhouetting themselves against the dark green of the boxwood hedges. The air was sweet, with the garden in full bloom. It was peaceful and harmonious beyond everything he had dreamed.

He smiled at Virginia and held out his hand. "I'll see you through," he said.

There was a pause filled with an understanding there had never been between them. At last Carrington spoke:

"We've become friends overnight, and all the others have become enemies."

"What happened to us all last night?" Virginia asked him.

"I know what happened to me," he answered. "In that strange silence I *saw* you for the first time. Maybe that happened to them, too. Maybe *they* all saw one another, too, and couldn't bear what they saw."

During the day every one tried to

atone for the night before. Toward sundown the terrace became animated; fast motors deposited guests from other great houses in the neighborhood. Outwardly everything there was full of color and animation, but in spite of the new elements, in spite of every one's effort, the discomfort of the night before, the unbelievable thing that had happened was there—it hung about them like some poisonous gas which permeated everything.

They all overdid their virtuous parts; they resembled little boys and girls, washed and starched to a point beyond all natural conduct. As they sat around in the big hall before dinner, they were as uncomfortable as though they had suddenly been transported into the society of those ladies and gentlemen of former generations whose portraits decorated the walls. It was as though they



"WE'VE BECOME FRIENDS OVERNIGHT, AND ALL THE OTHERS HAVE BECOME ENEMIES"

were in the company of people who, without judging them, forced them to measure themselves by some higher standard from which they fell short. Conversation became difficult, and as it died down the animosities that had been let loose the evening before came trooping back. One could almost see the ugly horde of them lying in wait, ready to destroy the hardly won but fragile compromise which they had effected. In spite of their efforts no breach had been healed, none of the old friendships had been re-established. Paul and Mitzi chaffed each other, but contempt and dislike peered out behind their gaiety. At last Crystal sprang to her feet.

"I can't sit in this hall with those tiresome people staring at me," she cried. "Have them carted away somewhere, Godfrey. They're not *my* ancestors! I want 'em taken away, and the clock in the dining-room—they spoil the talk!"

"Especially handsome Madame there," said Mitzi, pointing to a portrait over the mantel. "Handsome Madame, I shock you—yes? You laugh at me—yes?" She arose and made a courtesy. "Then why not withdraw where there will be no opera-singers—yes, and no *nouveau riche*—and no parvenues!" She looked mockingly from the company to the picture.

There was a breathless silence, so that Virginia's voice saying to Godfrey, "That's Diana Thorne, whose writing you liked," was audible throughout the room.

"So, Madame Diana Thorn," Mitzi went on, "*mes adieux* before you are retired from our contaminating presence!"

She might have been speaking to a real person. They all watched her silently. It was as though she taunted this other woman with her loss of power, as though she were saying to a real presence: "Yes, here I am, a common little comedian. I and my friends are here in your great house, and what are you going to do about it?"

Servants lighted lights, and suddenly the face of Diana Thorn leaped out of the dark as vivid as Mitzi, delicate, beautiful, humorous, and for a moment

they faced each other, Diana Thorn's eyes searching Mitzi to the bottom of her gutter-snipe soul. Some one turned the light that fell on the portrait, and Mitzi sank down in her chair with a sigh. There had been an odd sense of strain in the absurd histrionic scene.

Under cover of the chatter Godfrey said to Crystal: "This is fantastic. There's got to be an end of this. Come into the library with me. I want to talk to you." He shut the library door and turned to her. "I say, Crystal, let's cut the whole thing."

"How do you mean, cut it?"

"Cut it out—let's give it up. You see for yourself that this party's gone badly from the start, and Mitzi won't give it a chance."

"I can't send them away, can I?" Crystal inquired.

"You could find some way out of it, if you felt like it. You always do," he insisted.

Crystal paused reflectively. "I don't want to find what you call a way out. I want to fight it out and make it end right," she finally pronounced.

He tried another tack. "I'd so like it here awhile just with you," he said, wistfully. "I'd like a chance to feel it was our own house and not a hotel. We haven't got a home to our name, Crystal; we don't live in homes, but in institutions."

"Oh, I wouldn't be here without people for anything!" Crystal exclaimed. "It gives me shivers to be here alone a moment. It's a queer house. It's been shut up so long it does queer things to us. It's been silent so long that silence is in its walls; it's as if it were there just around the corner ready to pounce on us—and I'm going to chase it away."

Godfrey stared at Crystal curiously. The beauty of Thorn House wasn't there for her. It had given him its message. From the fruitful past it spoke of the fruitful future. It spoke of love and life and accomplishment. It had been built and maintained by the faithful service of those who lived in it. Never before had it been in the hands of wasters. It had made Godfrey feel that he had been inclosed in a luxurious prison, and that until now he hadn't known the real world and its possibilities. But to his

wife Thorn House was a hostile and silent place which she wished to conquer.

She caught his look of amazement, and put her hand lightly on his arm. "Poor old boy!" she said. "They have gotten on your nerves, haven't they? But I'll fix 'em for you, as soon as I get those hateful portraits away. I'll go and do it now." She started for the door.

There came to Godfrey a clear vision of Crystal's invasion of the house—of her trail over it, until there remained only a shell of itself. He couldn't bear it. When he had spoken so wistfully of wanting to be alone there, he had wanted Thorn House to possess Crystal, and now she had told him that she intended to possess it. He wanted to cry out, "You're trying to kill Thorn House; you're trying to kill beauty and reality and dignity," but he only said, quietly: "I don't think I'll have those pictures moved."

Crystal stared at him in astonishment. She smiled at him, then pouted. "Poor Crystal hates them so!"

"I'm sorry," he said. He wasn't used to disputing her will, and it embarrassed him.

"But, Godfrey—" she began, mildly, as though reasoning with a child.

"I tell you, it would spoil the room," he repeated. "And I can't do that—you can't want me to." He spoke cheerfully and evenly.

Crystal stared at him; then, as she saw a complete gravity under his pleasant manner, her own face hardened. They stood opposite each other, hostile and alien. It was as if they had never looked at each other before, and now what each one saw was incredibly displeasing.

Then Crystal said, slowly: "This house has been silent and empty too long. We've been for two days like people living in a haunted place. It needs life and noise and gaiety and new things. It needs to be made hospitable once more. As it is, we can't talk here. Things are as dull as a cemetery. I'm going to have people and people. I'm going to begin with an impromptu flower fête to-morrow, and have people from everywhere—and then more parties and more and more, and end with a great

masquerade. I shall have a Midsummer Fête like nothing that has ever been seen!"

She had talked herself into good humor again. She looked at him for approval, but Godfrey was standing staring at the floor.

"Why don't you answer, Godfrey?" she asked, sharply.

Again they measured each other with hostile scrutiny.

"I don't understand your attitude," Crystal continued. "You might say one pleasant word." Then, as he didn't answer, she shrugged impatiently. "The others 'll be sympathetic," she said, and with her departure there swept over Godfrey a feeling of desolation. It was as if she had linked herself definitely with the enemy of his peace.

The others took up Crystal's plan whirlwind wise. Ever since they came they had been waiting for something, it seemed, and this was it. They needed to forget that strange and disintegrating evening and the disquietingly dull and orderly day. Life and more life they wanted, things moving faster and even faster. It was as if they had tacitly agreed that there must be no empty moment in their lives and no instant of silence—especially no silence.

The next two weeks Virginia and Mrs. Pollock spent every morning in bringing the house back to its calm serenity, effacing the presence of these noisy aliens—a forlorn guard over an invisible treasure—and Godfrey and Carrington helped them. More and more Godfrey had taken refuge with them, for the misunderstanding between himself and Crystal became every day more irreconcilable.

Yet it was as though the company was fighting some unseen enemy rather than amusing themselves, as if they were fighting for their very existence, and as if this enemy lurked in the quiet of the house; and during this an ever-increasing madness grew in them, while underneath the tumult one could feel the animosities of the first evening were there, stifled but waiting their moment. There were not excitements enough in the world to blind them to it.

On the day of the great masquerade,

time dragged, time stood still, and perpetually silence lurked about them, ready at a moment's pause to come down upon them and extinguish them. They kept it at bay until the confusion of the guests' arrival helped them. As they descended the stairs it seemed as if every far corner had been ransacked for saffrons and greens, for deep orange and poignant blues. As every new group of people entered the house the uneasy madness of those who had been living within its walls seized them, and with the shifting of the noisy and brilliantly colored crowd the personality of the house seemed to recede, to become a lovely and dim background. Alone by itself it had always seemed full of color and to speak of life, but now of a sudden it had grown dim and gray and sad—an inconspicuous background for a riotous pageant. Yet all the various animosities and jealous rivalries were strangely on the surface, as though they might be tossed ruinously to the surface at any moment.

Crystal, absorbed in the details of the masque, Midsummer Madness, had left the guests to Virginia, and as the evening went on they gave her the effect as though they were all rushing on to some inevitable shipwreck. What it was she feared she could not tell. The sense of something fantastic and mysterious swept over her.

"Where's Godfrey?" Carrington asked at last. "He's got to come and help out with this. It's as if we were in a nightmare."

"I'll go and get him," Virginia said. She found him alone in the library. What she had to tell him was so vague

that she found herself talking incoherently about her own sense of deep disquiet. He looked at her strangely.

"Don't you know what's happened?" he said. "This house is poison to us! It hates us! It's done a terrible thing to us. It's stripped us bare of our little



"HANDSOME MADAME, I SHOCK YOU—YES?"

agreeable fripperies of the spirit and has shown us to one another as we are. In the silence that comes over us we are mirrored partly to one another; we see ourselves, and so we hate ourselves and are one another's enemies. Without our little social make-up we're all of us one another's enemies."

At Virginia's passionate gesture of dissent:

"All of us," he repeated, "Crystal and myself most of all. We haven't one



"THINGS ARE AS DULL AS A CEMETERY. I'M GOING TO HAVE PEOPLE AND PEOPLE"

common meeting-place with which to make a life together. I love *this*." He made a gesture toward the quiet walls of the library. He walked up and down and paused at the door. "You belong here," he cried. "This is your house! It loves you. When I come through these quiet rooms and see you sitting writing, it is as though you were inclosed in peace. The place is only empty and meaningless when they're all here. I tell you the house *hates* us, Virginia! Its silence has fought us since we came."

"Godfrey, you're mad."

"Of course I'm mad," he cried. "Why shouldn't I be? I can't have the thing I love, I can't have the life I want; money can't buy it any more than it could buy this house. I know you don't love me, Virginia; I know I shouldn't tell you I love you, but I can't keep myself from it. I can't have what I love and I hate what I have. It seems to me that this house hates me most of all."

It seemed to Virginia that all the things she had learned at Thorn House crowded around her.

"Poor Godfrey," she said, kindly.

"It's not me you love; it is this other thing that all of them won't let you have—the reality of life."

She was not thinking of herself at all, but all at once the realization of her position came over Godfrey. He buried his face in his hands. In his moment of madness he had made her position in his household an intolerable one; and Virginia, instead of blaming him, looked at him with complete and pitiful understanding.

Outside there was a pause before the masque. At either side of the staircase were groups of half-naked girls, bacchantes and dryads, awaiting their signal to begin. Suddenly the lights were turned low; Crystal, Mitzi, and Amy Nicholls stood before the audience dressed like three glittering birds—three white peacocks amid the color about them. A faun and two other nymphs stole forward and stood beneath the old portraits and talked to them in pantomime, and in pantomime they indicated that in this presence they could not dance. Then Crystal raised her hand, and footmen took down the portraits from the wall and moved up the stairs, two by two. They moved with exaggerated solemnity, as though walking to the strains of a funeral march. A little uneasy rustle went through the audience.

The last portrait was at the top of the stairs when a forlorn little black figure emerged from the brilliant crowd. It was Mrs. Pollock. She was oblivious of them and of the commotion she caused, sunk completely in her own grief. Like a stricken woman she followed the portrait up-stairs. She moved very slowly, as though between morning and afternoon very old age had overwhelmed her. She walked so slowly that it seemed an eternity before she reached the top of the stairs, and while she went up no one spoke. Age and dignity and grief were in her face, and there was the lassitude about her of some one whose heart had been broken and whose body has suffered with its heart. Breathlessly they watched her little, aged figure toil up the stairs in the wake of the pictures. Silence had gotten them. Silence that had stalked them since they came, that they had defied and beaten back, had

gotten them at last. The empty, discolored spaces on the walls looked down on them like dreadful blank windows that looked out at nothingness, and still the little, prim figure toiled up the stairs, and still they sat as though frozen.

Mrs. Pollock disappeared, and still silence held them. They seemed as though turned to stone. Moment after moment passed and no one stirred. Finally in the midst of this silence the music began a macaber ragtime. In the face of the motionless audience it was grotesque, fantastic, and yet no one stirred; they sat as if awaiting some invisible summons. Then Mitzi's laughter crashed out above the music, loud, hysterical, and at her laughter the music stopped.

"I'm going!" she cried. "I won't stay here! Come, Nicholls, come!"

Jealousy—never far below the surface with Amy Nicholls—flamed out with cold intensity. Speechless, she confronted Mitzi. They faced each other in the magnificence of their white peacock plumes like actors in some hateful pageant, hate and cruelty in both their eyes.

Nicholls strode forward. "Come on, Mitzi," he said, roughly. He had the air of a man who will pay any price to end a scene.

At this Amy Nicholls screamed, and Crystal led her from the room.

Again the company sat quiet and waiting.

"What's happened? Where have they gone?" No one, except those nearest had heard anything except Mitzi's laughter and Amy's cry. It happened like something rehearsed. The musicians looked helplessly at one another, awaiting some one to give the signal for the music. The lovely, half-naked girls waited restlessly for the cue which would not come. A little sighing ripple ran around the room, not more than a sigh, but it brought fear with it. People in the back part of the room began ebbing from the room quietly, almost timidly, as though leaving the scene of some disaster. They ebbed out as quietly and inevitably as sand from an hour-glass. Each little sound that they made echoed menacingly in the unnatural quiet. In the silence one could hear the rain on

the terrace outside. The rush of people grew and grew. Then one of the dancers screamed.

"Come on, come on!" she cried. "They're going! They're going! Something's happened!" And at this, panic broke loose. They streamed out of the house; they swarmed out of the windows; and with incredible cries and confusion they crowded in waiting motors as though escaping from some horror, while high above the staircase Mrs. Pollock watched them in stupefied amazement, and Virginia, with Carrington's arm around her, crushed herself into a corner to escape the stampede.

Then Crystal, pale as her own white costume behind her make-up, ran in. "Virginia," she cried, "what can I do? What can I do? Godfrey's left! He's gone for good. And I—I accused him of caring more for Thorn House and you than for me. I don't know what I did—I went mad for a moment; we're all mad to-night. I told him I wanted you

to go, and to send away that walking conscience, Mrs. Pollock. And he didn't answer a word, but looked at me as if he hated me; and he's gone—and I'm going! I won't stay here!" She swept on through the disordered room.

Still Carrington and Virginia stood together. Silence had fallen on Thorn House, and with silence instead of discomfort had come peace. Mrs. Pollock approached them, and, as though speaking to those whom she had served for years: "Unless you have orders I'll see to putting everything to rights. I'm sure you're tired." They looked at the nameless disarray left by the flying guests. Mrs. Pollock turned to Virginia; her voice rang out in a sort of stern triumph: "Thorn House has turned them out. It refused them from the night they came. You made it yours, and it wouldn't be taken from you. Thorn House hated them and turned them out! Thorn House, you wouldn't have them, and you drove them from you."

The Door-Harp

BY GRACE HAZARD CONKLING

YOU went. There drifted back to me
The last breath of a melody,
Diffused Æolian loveliness
Too fugitive to calm or bless.
I wonder human ear could know
A wraith of music fading so;
It left no footprints on the wind,
Nor even memory behind.

Was it some solacing sweet air,
Or cadence of a soul's despair?
The small harp quivers on the door
That you have closed forevermore,
But will not breathe the lyric cry
I have forgotten; and its sigh
When others go, is only pain
Because you do not come again.